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RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 6762  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 7841  
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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS, DRL

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[1](#)B. NEW DELHI 2109  
[1](#)C. NEW DELHI 1799  
[1](#)D. NEW DELHI 1684

[1](#)1. Below is a compilation of political highlights from Embassy New Delhi from August 4-8, 2008, that did not feature in our other reporting, including:

- All-Party Meeting on Jammu and Kashmir Launches a Process
- Supreme Court Extends Ban on Islamic Student Group
- Election Dates Discussed
- SP Demands Fair Share of Seats
- Amarinder to Lead Congress Campaign in Punjab
- Delhi University Professor Sacked on Charges of Sexual Harassment
- Delayed BJP Reaction to Swaraj's Conspiracy Claims

All-Party Meeting on Jammu and Kashmir Launches a Process

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[1](#)2. (U) After a nasty confrontation over the July 22 confidence vote in Parliament, the Congress Party and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) appeared to set aside temporarily their bitter combat and agree to a way forward on trying to resolve the Jammu and Kashmir uprising over the land transfer controversy (reftels). The BJP did not relent on its demands for transfer of land to the Amarnath Shrine Board and recall of the state governor, but it did sign on to a joint statement released on August 6 after an "all-party" meeting of 36 political parties convened by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. The joint statement noted the deep concern of all the participants at the unrest in the state, restoration of normalcy at the earliest, urged steps to prevent communalization of the controversy and committed to a process of dialogue with the protesters. Simultaneous, the all the member of the Amarnath Shrine Board (except the state governor and his principal secretary) resigned and a four-member committee of state luminaries was constituted to begin negotiations with the protesters in the Jammu region.

[1](#)3. (U) The Jammu protesters rejected the GOI's call to suspend their stir as curfews and intermittent traffic disruptions along National Highway 1A continued. After BJP

leader L.K. Advani urged the Prime Minister to initiate high level talks with the protesters, the GOI agreed to send a multiple party delegation headed by Home Minister Shivraj Patil to Jammu and Srinagar to hold talks with the protesters. The protest leaders agreed to talk to Patil, noting that "there may be forward movement" if the delegation presents "concrete proposals." Advani also spoke to the Punjab Chief Minister to request his support in opening up the national highway that was being blocked on the Punjab side of the Punjab-Jammu border. The situation in Jammu and Kashmir remains tense but the all-party meeting and the beginning of a dialogue process offer some hope that the situation can be resolved in the coming days and/or weeks.

#### Supreme Court Extends Ban on Islamic Student Group

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¶4. (U) The Indian Supreme Court on August 6 reversed the August 5 Delhi High Court ruling that lifted the ban on the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI), a key Islamic organization accused of links to Al Qaida and involvement in acts of terrorism throughout India. There was considerable uproar following the August 5 court ruling, with the main opposition party the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) accusing the ruling Congress Party-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) central government of "incompetence." Terrorism is expected to be a major issue during the election campaign, due before May 2009.

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¶5. (U) On August 5, the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Tribunal of the Delhi High Court had over-turned the ban on SIMI after the central government's Union Home Ministry failed to provide sufficient evidence linking SIMI to terrorist incidents. This follows a July 28 Tribunal directive to the Home Ministry and Intelligence Bureau to present convincing evidence to warrant outlawing the organization.

¶6. (U) SIMI was founded in 1977 and first banned in the aftermath of September 11, 2001. The organization has been accused of having close ties to Al Qaeda and Lashkar-e-Taiba, the Pakistan-based militant organization. It has also been implicated by Indian authorities in almost every act of terror within the country, including the recent wave of terrorist activity in the nation's info-technology capital of Bangalore and important business centers of Ahmedabad and Surat. However, no specific charges have been proven in court against the organization.

#### Election Dates Discussed

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¶7. (SBU) With the confidence vote in Parliament out of the way, the Congress Party is beginning to think about elections timing. On August 5, Congress leaders sat down for preliminary discussion on possible dates with UPA allies. There were several press reports indicating that the preferred date has narrowed down to November 2008 or February 2009. Some in the Congress Party are leaning towards earlier polls in the hope that the decisive confidence vote victory in Parliament over the U.S.-India Nuclear Initiative is still fresh on the public's mind. These proponents of earlier polls also argue that inflation and terrorism, the top two election issues, may turn for the worse for the UPA if elections are postponed till next year. Samajwadi Party (SP) leader Amar Singh told Charge d'Affaires August 8 that he expects the election to be held in February 2009.

¶8. (SBU) The Election Commission, meanwhile, called a meeting on August 11 to decide Assembly poll schedules for Jammu and Kashmir, Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Mizoram. Conventional wisdom is that Jammu and Kashmir is expected to go to polls in October (if they do

not get postponed as a result of the current unrest) and the other states in mid-November.

#### SP Demands Fair Share of Seats

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¶9. (SBU) The Samajwadi Party (SP), which played a critical role preventing the collapse of the UPA government after the Left withdrew support, is in negotiations to determine seat sharing arrangements with the Congress Party in Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Uttarakhand and Bihar in time for the next Lok Sabha elections. This is the most important pound of flesh that the SP will demand. SP's Amar Singh confirmed to Charge d'Affaires on August 8 that it is still not clear whether the SP will ask for representation in the cabinet. One school of thought within the SP wants to stay out of the government during its last few months so as not to be tarred by the anti-incumbency factor that will inflict the UPA as it goes to the polls.

#### Amarinder to Lead Congress Campaign in Punjab

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¶10. (U) In another sign that Indian political parties are beginning to focus on the national election, due by May 2009, the Congress Party on August 6 appointed former Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh chairman of the state party unit's election campaign. Amarinder Singh's appointment revives his political fortunes after he was sidelined when he led the party to a crushing defeat in the February 2007 state

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assembly elections. According to local press, Congress leaders in Punjab said that Amarinder's new role will invigorate the party for upcoming elections, noting his aggressive tactics in confronting the ruling Akali Dal-BJP coalition. Shortly after his appointment, Amarinder vowed to win all 13 Lok Sabha seats in Punjab and to "let myself loose" on the Akali Dal in the state.

¶11. (U) While Mohinder Singh Kaypee remains the Punjab Congress Party "working" president, he is seen as merely a token to provide some "schedule caste" (i.e. Dalit) balance to the party organization in the state. Kaypee previously served in Amarinder's cabinet and is popularly considered an "Amarinder loyalist" who will tow the line. Amarinder Singh's nemesis will continue to be former Chief Minister Rajinder Kaur Bhattal, who retains her position as leader of the Congress Legislative Party. Bhattal and Amarinder openly fended with each other following Congress' election defeat in February. Amarinder accused Bhattal of being in bed with the rival Akali Dal party, while Bhattal accused Amarinder of stealing millions of dollars worth of state assets during his administration's term from 2002 to 2007.

#### Delhi University Professor Sacked on Charges of Sexual Harassment

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¶12. (U) In late July, the University of Delhi's Executive Council fired mathematics professor Atul Razdan on charges of sexual harassment filed by a first year student. The grievance process lasted over a year from the initial filing of the First Information Report (FIR) in March 2007, as the mathematics department initially refused to file charges.

¶13. (U) The university's reluctance to dismiss professors for inappropriate behavior is not a new phenomenon. In March, the Democratic Teachers' Front expressed concern over the callous handling of cases related to the sexual harassment of female instructors and students at the Delhi University campus. The Students Federation of India (SFI) accused the university of "encouraging" sexual harassment by failing to investigate and take action against reported incidents. There are several pending cases against professors, and while the university has established inquiry

committees, an overall dragging-of-heels gives little hope for progress in the near future.

¶14. (SBU) Although punitive action in sexual harassment cases is rare, Razdan's dismissal provides hope for pending cases and encourages those reluctant to report incidents because they view the process as a loss of time, money, and reputation in the face of apathetic university administrators. The Indian parliament may soon force universities to tackle the problem, as an updated law on sexual harassment was proposed in early 2007 and will likely be passed in the next session.

Delayed BJP Reaction to Swaraj's Conspiracy Claims

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¶15. (U) BJP spokesman Prakash Javedkar on July 31 formally disassociated the party from Sushma Swaraj's statements alleging the Congress-Party-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) involvement in the Bangalore and Ahmedabad bombings. Javedkar told reporters that Swaraj's provocative statements on July 28 were an emotional response after the UPA's victory in the trust vote the previous week. He added, "Swaraj is frustrated and a frustrated person can say anything." During a National Democratic Alliance Conference on July 28, one day after the Ahmedabad terrorist attack, Swaraj had claimed that the bombings were UPA planned and executed to divert public attention from the "cash-for-votes" scandal that surfaced during the July 22 confidence vote. The BJP senior leadership has kept a studious silence on Swaraj's comments

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to avoid creating further discord in the party and to let the Swaraj story die down quickly.

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